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PROFESSOR WHITNEY'S INFLUENCE

ON

CLASSICAL PHILOLOGISTS.

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IT was, of course, natural that those pupils of Professor Whitney who made Oriental studies, and especially Indian literature and antiquities, their chief pursuit, should come into the closest relations with him, and receive from him the strongest influences and deepest impressions. They are also best qualified, now that the master is gone, to testify of his powers and achievements as a master. But the larger proportion of men who took Professor Whitney's graduate courses, especially after 1871, were fitting themselves for careers as teachers either of the modern or of the classical languages and literatures. To adopt the terminology of our schools, these men took Professor Whitney's courses as minor courses. Nevertheless, they too were profoundly impressed by Professor Whitney's personality and work. Most of them are now occupying honorable positions in our academic life. They do not hand on the special traditions of the school of Indian studies which Professor Whitney founded for this country, but they are carrying into their own fields of investiga-

tion a spirit, a method, and an ideal which they caught from him.

It seems as though no man could again attain to the absolute impartiality of his spirit. A young enthusiast often mistook its crystal clarity for coldness and lack of zest. It prevented Professor Whitney from being what is called magnetic. For this a certain degree of partisanship would seem to be requisite. It even made him seem at times to lack proper appreciation of a beauty or a power which others were more ready to acknowledge; and this, no doubt, kept him from the somewhat ephemeral success of interesting and stirring large miscellaneous classes of undergraduates. A young man just entering the domain of classical philology, and getting his first ranges over the fields of classical literature, is sure to have a distorted idea of the relative superiority of those literatures, from comparative ignorance both of other ancient and of modern literatures. This often blinds him to the real merits of other literary expressions, and especially to much of the narrowness and squalor of ancient classical life, and to its hideous injustices. It was not, then, alone the fact that Professor Whitney introduced such students to a new ancient language and literature of great richness, upon which successive ages had spent themselves in comment and elucidation, but it was his comparative estimate of this and other ancient languages and literatures, or of all ancient and modern languages and literatures, which led those who came under his teaching to revise their standards and readjust their mental perspectives. He did not unduly exalt the

new language and literature. His students never detected in him the specialist's natural partiality for that range of human endeavor which happens to be most in his thoughts. Rather, he slowly but surely, and almost always indirectly, brought a pupil to acknowledge to himself that a zeal born of ignorance had led him to indulge in a species of mental idolatry. But no iconoclasm followed the conviction. It was above all things a calmness and deliberateness of mental activity which was most fostered by contact with Professor Whitney's spirit,—a spirit which made him a dull controversialist, but a relentless opponent.

Professor Whitney's method was usually a revelation and an inspiration to his pupils. It was the method under which alone so comprehensive and masterful a mind as his, relatively unfired by imagination, must work, if it works at all, after the process of mere acquisition is complete,—the method of a Boeckh or a Darwin. It insisted upon the full accumulation of facts, and discouraged inference until inference could no more be deferred. Most of his pupils, before coming to him, had not risen above the idea of simple acquisition, and there was nothing organic even in their acquisition. It was agglutinative. Acquisition under his guidance had to be thorough and complete, and he shunned no dreariest monotony in enforcing it. But underneath the patience and serenity with which he sought to secure this with his pupils there lurked plainly, not exactly contempt for the mere acquisition or the process of acquisition, but the feeling that as means to an end it must not be suffered to eclipse the end. That end,

as it was natural for one to feel who had swept such a wide range of comparative studies, was the reconstruction of a past national life, or of the processes of a long organic development, and the estimate of their part in the great competitive struggle of races and peoples and institutions, in which our present civilization and its complex problems have been evolved. This method was not formally taught in set phrase, nor was it soon perceived. Rather, it slowly dawned upon the pupil by participation in the mental processes of the teacher. Once having dawned, the vision never faded.

In spirit and in method, then, Professor Whitney was clearly Aristotelian rather than Platonic. He was never known to appeal to the emotions or the imagination. His influence discouraged such appeals. It was a natural result, therefore, that those pupils at least who did not come into more intimate and even confidential relations with him, felt that he was lacking somewhat on the side of esthetic literary discrimination. It is not improbable that the long protraction and rigid maintenance of the severely scientific side of his studies tended to produce in him, as in Darwin, more or less atrophy of certain senses which had at an earlier period been strong.

The example of Professor Whitney's career gave all his pupils a lofty ideal, and most of them a new ideal. The old ideal of an academic instructor in the classics was that of a genial man, of good literary form, who had acquired enough to teach what was required of him in a stimulating way, without much reference to anything beyond the formation of a good literary taste and

style in the pupil. This may well be still the collegiate ideal. But no true university work can be done until both instructor and pupil come under the influence of the larger ideal, the historical ideal. Language, literature, and institutions must all be studied as exponents of a great national life, in fierce contest for supremacy with other great national lives. It was the manifest desire in Professor Whitney to bring the national life and thought of India into fair comparison with those of the two great peoples of Greece and Rome, which most impressed those of his pupils who were classical philologists. And the fact that it was his privilege and his glory to do pioneer work in this comparatively new field, the fact that he was known to be an honored co-laborer with the best powers of England and the Continent in making the intellectual and religious life of a great ancient people, and the more obscure steps in the evolution of the greatest institutions of human society accessible to modern thought,—these facts not only increased the confidence and pride of his pupils in him, but opened their eyes to the essential solidarity of the highest intellectual life and effort of the present day,—to the internationality of the highest science. Hellenists, Latinists, and linguists of every sort, and even historical students in the more restricted sense, all over this country and Europe, are now laboring each in his chosen field, with a more equable spirit, a broader method, and a loftier ideal, because they have caught them all, directly or indirectly, from the master whose memory we honor.